

Vaughan, William

A N S W E R

TO

O B J E C T I O N S

AGAINST THE

L O N D O N - D O C K S .

William Vaughan

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A N S W E R
T O
O B J E C T I O N S
AGAINST THE
LONDON-DOCKS.

THE necessity and utility of Wet Docks for the Port of London are become so generally admitted, that the question is now only as to their Situation, Capacity, and Management.

There are only three Situations for Docks of moment, Wapping, Rotherhithe, and the Isle of Dogs. Each may have their natural advantages and their temporary or permanent defects. Almost all other plans are limited, and confined to the improvement of local spots on the banks of the River, or of deepening the bed of it, if practicable.

Without doubting the eligibility of either of the three spots, the questions are reduced to these points; whether it is more for the convenience of commerce and the ultimate security of revenue to have Docks for the immediate discharge of ships under cranes, than Docks in more distant situations, under the necessity of lighterage, with great additional Port-risks, expenses, and delays?

The plan of the London-Docks in Wapping embraces the first object, and possesses the great advantage of vicinity to the City, to Revenue-Boards, and to the Seat of Business.

The boundaries contain an area of above 80 acres. It is proposed for the present to form two separate Docks, one Basin, and a large Lighter-Dock; all of them, in the present form of the Docks, capable of receiving near 400 sail of loaded ships, with room for shipping and for lighters.

Two of the Entrances to be within a quarter of a mile and half a mile from the Tower, and a third by a Canal from Blackwall to the Docks,

Docks, of two miles and three-quarters long.

The Depth of the Docks and Canal to be 24 feet, and to be capable of containing ships from 300 to 500 tons burthen and upwards.

The exact Form and Size of the Docks and Basen will be discretionary, and capable of enlargements and subdivisions.

OBJECTIONS.

The only Objections of moment are, the Risk of Fire:

The Impracticability of the Canal:

The Risk of Smuggling in the Canal:

The Want of Capacity in the Docks:

And an Inability in the extension of them.

FIRE.

Though shipping is a combustible property in all situations, at sea and in port, yet it is, comparatively speaking, subject to few risks in either. In many ports, ships ride at anchor detached from each other. In the

Thames, from the extent of the trade of London, and of the state of the River, they lie in distinct tiers, and close to each other in those tiers. Ships are not, however, without their risks in the River in case of fires, to which vessels in Docks are not liable. They are under no regulations about fire, candle, and cookery. At high water, all ships lie afloat; but, at low water, many are left dry upon the banks of the River, and have been frequently burnt from that circumstance only. In case of fire, ships in tiers, that ground at low water, cannot move until the return of the tide. High winds and strong tides create danger to shipping, when vessels on fire run adrift; and there have been instances where floats on fire passing London-Bridge, falling among tiers of shipping at Rotherhithe, have destroyed two or three vessels.

In times of frost, still-waters are more liable to freeze than rivers; but, in general, our winters are not very severe, and the Thames is seldom frozen over, unless occasioned by the shipping below Bridge often collecting and checking the ice, floating up and down with the tide, so as to make the River not only frozen over and impassable, but dangerous

rous to shipping, while there is little or no ice above Bridge. In Holland, and in all cold countries, where ships are regularly frozen up a whole winter, we seldom hear of accidents.

When apprehensions are strong, experience is our best guide ; and whoever has looked at all Docks abroad, and at home, will find that fires have been scarcely known, and less frequent in them than in rivers. Even at Rotterdam and Amsterdam, where ships lay and discharge in Canals, close to houses, in the very hearts of those cities, and liable to frosts, we seldom hear of fire.

In all Docks, ships are under the strongest regulations about fire and candle and the use of pitch and tar, and are never permitted to cook on-board.

In Docks, vessels are always *afloat*, which is not the case in rivers ; they may be also more easily removed in still-water to the side of the Dock-Quays than in a tide-way, so as to present but one side of a ship to the shipping in dock. In this situation, a vessel on fire may be singled out from the rest and scuttled, where there will be frequently more depth of

water than in the River at low tide, or it may be burnt by itself. In case of Fire, floating-engines and engines on shore would always be at hand. Buildings would not communicate Fire to ships in Dock, from the intermediate breadth of the wharf, and from the buildings themselves being Fire-Proof, and no candles or fires ever permitted in them.

For the better security against Fire, and to Revenue, the premises are to be walled round, and cooking-houses, under strict regulations, to be stationed at particular and very distant angles in the premises, or without the same.

Some estimate may be made of the risk from the premium of insurance against Fire being the same in Dock as in the River.

In times of Frost, many of the ships might be moved out of the Docks, and lay the length of the Canal, and the Ice in the Docks and Canal frequently broken, by letting the water out of each of them, and be again replenished with water on the next ensuing tide. In all situations, ships will be less effected by the floating Ice in Docks than in the River; and it is the opinion of the best-informed, that
there

there is more risk of Fire in the River than in Docks.

IMPRACTICABILITY OF THE CANAL, &c.

The objections are, its length and difficulties of Navigation; the Drawbridges; the deep cutting; and the points of Entrance, as to the depth of water and difficulty of access.

Ships, navigating the Canal, may be under regulations as to the time of passing and re-passing, on account of the convenience of drawbridges, and the security of Revenue; and, for the greater protection of the latter, need not be permitted to navigate the Canal, but, under regulations and inspection, from sun-rise to sun-set.

The line of the Canal is two miles and three-quarters. It may be stated that an inland canal is now forming, from the River Severn to Gloucester, for ships of 500 tons, the extent of which is seventeen miles. There is another navigable canal from Ostend to Bruges, for ships of 300 tons, of twelve miles long, which are tracked by three or four horses at the rate of about two miles an hour.

A ship in the Blackwall-Cut may be tracked by its crew, or by horses, in less than two hours with facility, from the purchase being easy, and in still-water.

Drawbridges. — In all passages of moment double Drawbridges might be made, or one Bridge be so situated as to aid another, and only to be opened at stated periods.

The great thoroughfares from Limehouse and Blackwall to London are by two parallel roads, near each other, in Ratcliff-highway, Back-lane, and Sermon-lane, at which Drawbridges are to be placed; and plans might be so arranged, with a road on each side of the Canal, that vessels might pass each at stated periods; and the Drawbridges only opened at one road while shut at the other, of which signals might be given. The distance of either road would not make much difference, and the delay little. In all other parts of the Canal, the line of it runs behind the present buildings, and leaves an uninterrupted communication between London with Limehouse and Blackwall, and those places with each other, or with the River. The only remaining inconveniencies of moment,

ment, with respect to the other roads and Drawbridges, are over to Stepney, and Bow, and Bromley, where the intercourse is comparatively small, and where Drawbridges when opened would not take three minutes to open and shut for the passage of a ship; and, on an average, a less period per ship, if more than one passed at a time.

At the Liverpool, Hull, Ostend, and Havre Docks, Drawbridges are perpetually used without inconvenience or delay: and, at Amsterdam and Rotterdam, Drawbridges so intersect the streets and canals, and are so constructed, that a single person, by means of a linch-pin, opens these gates when occasion requires: they are instantly closed again by the weight of a person's body; and a single person passing over, performs the operation of closing the gates.

Deep cutting will only form a small part of the Canal, the rest being below high-water mark.

At the entrance of the Canal at Blackwall will be a Basen, for the reception of ships at all tides. Thirty vessels may enter the same in one tide, and be shut into the Basen at the time

time of high water, at spring and neap tides, and proceed at their leisure along the Canal, under any regulations that may be requisite.

The same wind that brings ships up the River will carry them into the Canal; and the same wind that carries vessels down the River, will carry them out of the Canal.

At Bugby's Hole, near the mouth of the River Lea, might be made a mooring-place for 20 ships and upwards, in case ships should be ever prevented for a tide getting into the Canal.

The entrances into the Dock at Wapping would also, at all times, be open for ships in and above the Pool, and thereby leave the upper part of the River less crowded, and more free for navigation.

Depth of Water. — There will be depth of water in the Docks and Canal for the reception and discharge of all ships that come into the port of London that lie above Blackwall. — There are not many ships above 500 tons. Small East-Indiamen could be admitted with facility, and all the large ones, that discharge part of their cargoes at Long Reach, and

and come up to Blackwall to discharge the remainder, would be able to come into the Docks and Canal for that purpose.

The Depth of Water at full tides will be about 24 to 26 feet, and at neap tides 19 to 21 feet. The Docks, Canal, and Gates, will be 6 feet below low-water mark of a spring-tide.

The Filth or Sediment in the Docks and Canal would be small compared with Hull, Liverpool, Ostend, and Ramsgate, and all places that lie within the tide of the sea, or the vortex of its influence.

The Basons at Blackwall and at Wapping would be more susceptible of the influence of the Sediment of the River than the Docks or Canal, and they could always be cleaned by back-water at pleasure. It is remarkable that at Hull, and other Docks where there are no back-waters, that the Filth only reaches about the length of a ship.

SMUGGLING.

Ships in the River and in the Canal will be, in many respects, in the same situation,
and

and under the same regulations and inspection of officers, and of not breaking their hatchways, or not unloading their cargoes until their arrival at moorings in the River or into Docks by the Canal.

Smuggling will not be so great when ships are pent up in a narrow Canal as in the River: if any, it will be before ships come so high up the River.

The great harvest of plunder is at the moment a ship begins to work out her cargo, and is partly owing to the mode of discharge and the frequent delays and detentions for lighters. Smuggling in the River is great from its facility, and is formed into a regular system from the number of boats constantly hovering about ships night and day during the discharge, from the men employed in working them going on shore two or three times a day to their meals, and from the ease of secreting of plunder in receiving-houses along the banks of the River, with back or cellar doors to them, where no inquiries are made. This trade furnishes many a retail shop to a great extent, and to an extent almost past all belief. Some calculate it at near 4 or 500,000l.

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per annum, but may be taken, within bounds, at above 200,000/. per annum.

Lighters constitute a second stage of pilfering, from the fresh opportunities given to plunder, independent of new delays, new risks, and heavy expenses in Port.

The Evils of the River are great; nothing can correct them and give security to property and to revenue but dispatch. The landing of cargoes immediately out of the ship under cranes, to the king's beam, will lessen expense, decrease risks and delays attendant on all other plans and spots, give relief to the merchant, and ease, economy, as well as security and increase to the revenue.

No Evils on the CANAL can be compared to the present ones on the RIVER. Regulations can be more easily applied to ships passing the Canal in their way to the Docks to discharge, than in the present defective and expensive system of unloading in the River, and watching the cargo in detail in lighters until landed.

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With every advantage of Docks in other situations, they will always be subject to risks, detentions, and port-charges, to which the proposed Docks will be exempted.

In the Canal, ships might be put under protection and regulation as to the mode and time of passing, between sun-rise and sun-set, for the convenience of the passenger and security of the revenue, and not be permitted to break bulk or open their hatchways until they come into Dock. Officers can, with greater facility, watch, protect, and detect, in the Canal than in the River, and particularly as there will be few lighters and boats in the Canal, or receiving-houses along-side its banks. Little smuggling could go forward with the hook and line without noise or detection; besides letting down sugar and other property into the water without injury or previous preparation on-board.

It would also be much easier to correct the evils on the Canal by regulations, than have hitherto been effected upon the River, Even the Bomb-Boat Act has not prevented boats in the River smuggling, particularly
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at night-time, which gives every means, opportunity, and security, to plunder.

There was little objection as to the line of Canal up to Gloucester about smuggling.

MEANS OF EXTENSION.

Though the boundaries or general outlines of the ground were obliged to be specified, yet the form and number of the Docks may be varied, increased, and subdivided, according to convenience or to the calls of trade.

The Canal itself forms a large Dock, capable of a number of recesses and depôts, or magazines, for corn, coals, timber, and other articles, so as to give to the metropolis security, cheapness, and easy cartage, upon emergencies or in times of frost, independent of forming depôts for foreign trade, and of lessening some of the supposed apprehensions of risks about fire in Docks and in the River.

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The Canal would in itself make a great leading feature, and form one of the entrances or avenues to a series of docks, in the vicinity of the metropolis on the north side of the Thames. These Docks might be made in the Isle of Dogs and higher up on each side of the Canal, with several communications to the River for various classes of trades and objects, and would unite, by means of inland navigations, in one great system, our foreign and our internal trade.

Though the intended Bill was limited at this moment to a specific object for present accommodation, yet there will be found leading principles in it of making depôts on the most extensive scale, and of forming a basis for future extensions whenever an increase of commerce or a change of circumstances should call for them.

In forming, however, these extensions, relation should be had to the times, to the nature and extent of our commerce, the comparative bulk of our foreign and our domestic trade, and to those regulations and situations

tions that are the most peculiarly adapted to their respective and particular interests and convenience of those trades; and it will become a question how far the coasting-trade and colliers, on an extensive scale, are attached or will attach themselves to the bed and the banks of the River; and whether, if placed into Docks, they would not require the same lighter-navigation as at present, without lessening some of the evils occasioned by the crowded state of the River? In many cases, the coasting-trade would be removed from their accustomed wharfs, along the banks of the River, where they already discharge under cranes.

Leaving the principles of the Bill and the necessity of the Docks to stand or fall by the support or wants of the public, I shall make a short reply to the objections of the London-Dock Company being monopolists, and to the length of time of making the Docks.

In general, Corporations possess great monopolies and exclusive privileges; but the London-Dock Company ask no exclusive ones, they invade few rights, take away no tolls from

the City which are levied on the commerce of the port by charters or acts, and leave other plans open.

All ships will have the liberty to go into the Docks, and, when in them, to discharge at their own discretion at the quays or into lighters, and thus accommodate every part of the River.

They ask no parliamentary aid, and only its sanction to purchase and satisfy for lands, houses, and interests, and to have powers of internal regulations.

The time of completing the Docks has been another *objection*. Parts may be finished and used in about two or three years, and afford speedy relief, while the greater works were carried on; and, on a peace, employment might be given to a number of hands, dismissed from public service.

A limitation of dividends was made to correct evils found in some other public undertakings, and to compel a reduction of rates or extension of conveniences. Many companies

companies and canals are limited as to dividends.

What constitutes a part of the merit of the Bill has been objected to as its great defect, and has been industriously and *purposely misstated*, to mislead the public mind, by men whose stations were created for public convenience, and not for their own private emolument, and who would not like their own monopolies or their own profits to be checked, limited, or controlled.

The present plan has been proposed and supported, by mercantile interests, for commercial convenience, and to correct the evils which they themselves labour under. If it be asked, under whose management should the plan be carried into execution? the same reply may be given which some of the old wise merchants of France gave, in the days of M. Colbert, when he asked them how he could best serve and promote commerce, "*Laissez nous faire.*"

The merchants are the best guardians of commerce, and the best know their own wants,

wants, and are the best able to correct their own evils. Their plans will create dispatch and competitions in a port that has for years laboured under combinations that have been injurious to property and to revenue, and oppressive to commerce.

London,
March 29, 1796.

THE END.

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